DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 436 742 CS 013 794

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TITLE	Reading Recovery in the Far Northeast.
INSTITUTION	Reading Recovery Council of North America, Columbus, OH.
PUB DATE	1996-00-00
NOTE	5p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT	Network News; p6-8 Spr 1996
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Techniques; *Early Intervention; Educational Change; Evaluation Methods; Instructional Effectiveness; Primary Education; *Program Implementation; *Reading Difficulties; *Reading Instruction; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	*Maine; *Reading Recovery Projects

ABSTRACT

Two articles are presented on the implementation of Reading Recovery in Maine. The first article, "Collaborative Efforts Can Make a Difference: The Development of Reading Recovery in Maine" articulates and shares the process which took place in Maine in the hope that it will assist interested stakeholders in other states in the implementation of Reading Recovery programs. The first article discusses a successful collaboration in the making and then presents suggestions for others. The second article, "Reading Recovery: An Unintended Vehicle for Change," describes how the implementation of Reading Recovery in the Bangor Public Schools provided the impetus for improvement and the vocabulary to establish core understandings among teachers. It discusses shifts in teacher beliefs and practices; shifts in evaluation procedures; and shifts in "average" levels of performance. (RS)

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Reading Recovery in the Far Northeast:

Collaborative Efforts Can Make a Difference: The Development of Reading Recovery

Kathryn Manning

Reading Recovery: An Unintended Vehicle for Change

Robert Ervin

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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READING RECOVERY IN THE FAR NORTHEAST

Collaborative Efforts Can Make a Difference: *The Development of Reading Recovery In Maine*

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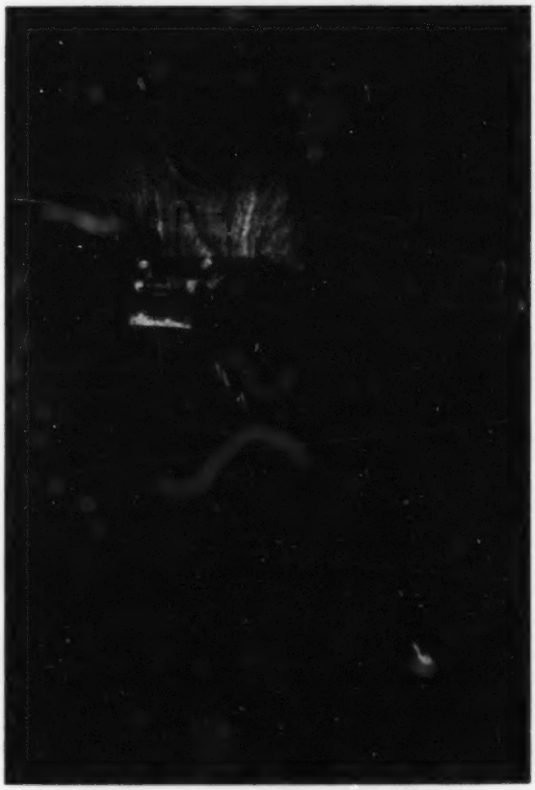
The Reading Recovery Program has grown quickly in Maine. Currently, there are ten RR teacher training sites serving 240 RR trained and in-training teachers. Courses have been developed by the University of Maine for primary teachers to learn instructional practices which support children during and after the RR intervention and to improve overall literacy instruction in the primary grades. Related opportunities have been developed for teachers of special education and a pilot Early Literacy Learning Initiative (from The Ohio State University) training center is currently being established at Westbrook. In short, that which a few years ago seemed an impossible task has become a reality and is still growing.

When asked how this came to be, most people involved in the process would give credit to coordinated efforts among Maine school districts, the University of Maine, and the Maine Department of Education. If the questioner persisted in an attempt to discover how such a successful coordinated effort came about, it is difficult to imagine how people would respond; many probably have taken this collaborative process for granted. I am told that such collaborations are not common in all states. This article is an attempt to articulate and share the process which took place in Maine in the hope that it will assist interested stakeholders in other states in the implementation of this remarkable early intervention literacy program.



Patricia Jackman with kindergarten children.

A Successful Collaboration In the Making

During the mid 1980s, several educational communities in Maine began to explore RR. As a result of growing interest in the program, Diane DeFord, trainer of teacher leaders and professor at the Ohio State University, was invited to speak at the University of Maine Summer Literacy Institute. Chapter 1 coordinators attended conferences and began to direct questions about RR to the Maine Department of Education. In 1989, I was invited to join the staff of the department's Division of Compensatory Education. As a former RR teacher from Ohio, my role was to provide background information, serve as a liaison to districts, and answer specific questions concerning the program and its implementation.

With assistance from Jeanne Evans, teacher leader at Trotwood, Ohio and other RR staff, I conducted regional meetings where we described a lesson, explained the assessment and selection procedures, outlined how the program could be implemented at the school level, and discussed the use of federal funds. The efforts to provide information about RR results were facilitated by Elaine Roberts, the National Diffusion Network coordinator at the Maine Center for Educational Services.

In 1990, a group of 26 educators traveled to Ohio to observe RR teacher training sessions and to attend the Ohio Reading Recovery Conference and National Institute. Following these activities, interest grew rapidly and the critical need to include university support became apparent. Robert Cobb, Dean of the College of Education at the University of Maine (UM) was contacted. Through discussion with administrators from school districts, the university, and the Department of Education, it became clear this was an enormous undertaking that could not be done well, if at all, in isolation.

Strong grass-roots support for the program came from school districts interested in adopting the program. In 1991, the university invited Paula Moore to serve in the role of trainer of teacher leaders and sent her for a year of training in New Zealand. Responding to a grant proposal from the University of Maine and the Maine Department of Education in 1993, Governor John McKernan allocated approximately one million dollars over two years to assist school districts in reaching the goal of statewide implementation of the RR program. With the leadership of his commissioner of education, Leo Martin, funds were increased through a legislated funding initiative. Current Governor Angus King has continued to support this effort. For 1996-97, Commissioner Wayne Mowatt has advertised 80 grants of $8,300 each for RR teacher training and $1,500 for each trained teacher and teacher leader for continuing support. A

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summer institute is being planned to provide a shared learning opportunity at the state's expense to school staff where a systematic early literacy program which includes RR is being developed. Teacher leader and technology needs have also been addressed.

Suggestions for Others

While this sketch of commitment and events is not complete, it does help to demonstrate the communication among interested groups. When Maine educators discovered a task that was beyond their capability, they were able to find someone who was able to provide the needed next step.

From Maine's experiences, the Reading Recovery community could offer these suggestions:

- Invite decision-makers to observe an inservice session that includes "behind the glass" lessons. It is difficult for those not involved in the program to understand how this program differs from other worthy instruction. Governors, commissioners of education and legislators need to know specifics about the program before they can commit their support.
- Do not assume that everyone has the information needed to make a decision. Awareness sessions are critical for providing information and clarifying misconceptions. Questions or concerns should be directed to the appropriate persons for response, because misinformed assumptions may lead to decisions that deny services to children.
- Share accomplishments of the children in RR by making the results of the program public. Providers of funding need to know about children's successes as a result of the program. Send personalized results to legislators in your area.
- Investigate funding sources and determine their requirements. In Maine, for example, Title I funds cover the majority of RR salaries. It is imperative that the Title I requirements are understood and that steps are taken to insure those requirements are fulfilled. There are other sources to investigate. For example, the Improving America's Schools Act provides an opportunity to include RR in systematic planning for districts.
- Invite State Department of Education staff to conferences and make sure they are on your mailing lists. They are keenly interested in providing quality services to children and are often called upon for advice and information.
- Be knowledgeable about the kinds of statewide assessment being planned. Offer to assist in the planning. Let planners know about the RR assessment and how many people in districts throughout the state are using it.

From left: Kathryn Manning, Paula Moore, Marie M. Clay.

It is important to work with your colleagues at all levels to present a consistent message. RR has documented the experiences of Maine students who have moved from the bottom of their class to become successful readers and writers. It has caused educators to examine practices and the way they teach in primary grades and at the university level. It is clear that this successful collaboration should not be taken for granted. It became a reality because of the combined effort and commitment of a wide range of interested stakeholders. It has set a precedent to meet the Maine Department of Education's mission statement:

High performance by all students.

No excuses. No exceptions.

Reading Recovery: An Unintended Vehicle for Change

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BANGOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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While the goal of Reading Recovery is to serve first grade children who are at risk of failure in learning to read, implementation of the program offers school systems an opportunity to focus discussion in an area which has a history of strong philosophical and often emotional debate: reading instruction. The critical importance of beginning reading has made its instruction fair game for a confusing exchange among experts and vulnerable to the shifting "innovations" of publishers. Teachers in Bangor, Maine were aware of the intellectual and practical debates and were ready to tackle these issues when Reading Recovery was implemented in the district in 1991. But how? Though perhaps not intended, RR would provide the impetus for improvement and, maybe most importantly, the vocabulary to establish core understandings among teachers.

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Shifts in Teacher Beliefs and Practices

The training year for the ten RR teachers carried the pressure and demands which only trainees can appreciate, but a program emerged which promised reading achievement for even the lowest students. Teachers watched skeptically from their classrooms, and not surprisingly, when program emphasis shifted to classroom support for the RR children, the program ran headlong into a potpourri of instructional practice. But whatever concerns either group might have had were dispelled by a mutual interest in how best to teach reading to children.

The classroom teachers wondered about the organization and methods of RR. The interest went to the roots of their professional existence, so when first grade teachers were offered the opportunity to learn more about the methods of RR during an in-service session on supportive teaching, they accepted eagerly. Many had spent a career stymied by "recipe teaching" and were distracted by the deeply divisional philosophical shifts which made discussion testy, even within their school culture. For them, Reading Recovery encompassed several positive characteristics they wanted to explore, including: (a) a well organized structure; (b) an analytical device, the running record; (c) the leveling of literature; (d) a well-defined assessment, the Observation Survey; and most importantly, (e) a kind of teacher-based dynamic decision-making which invigorated instruction.

As RR teachers worked to gain their first successes, first grade teachers were making subtle instructional shifts. The shifts carried risk, but by the middle of the second year of implementation, the stage was set for teachers to respond to a major challenge issued two years earlier by the Superintendent of Schools.

Shifts in Evaluation Procedures

The Metropolitan Achievement Test had been an April event for years, but first grade teachers were unconvinced that the results fairly described reading achievement. In the spring of 1990, the teachers met with the superintendent to object to the use of standardized tests as a measure of student achievement. His response was direct: he suspended standardized testing, but issued a challenge to develop a valid alternative assessment of achievement. A year passed. The task was daunting and organizing an assessment required a consensus on reading which dug deep into teachers' core values. The project never got off the ground and standardized testing returned. Its reintroduction shook teachers, some of whom now were in staff development activities led by the teacher leader. Reading Recovery seemed to provide a methodological base for their classroom evaluation and improvement of reading.

In 1992 five teachers and the assistant superintendent met to tackle the problem of a performance assessment in reading. Borrowing from the successful project initiated by the Upper Arlington School District of Ohio, they built a literature-based assessment that measured the development of fluency, the construction of meaning, comprehension, cue source analysis through the running record, and students' reading sense. The analysis profile developed initially for teachers became a record of progress for parents. After a mid-year pilot, teachers moved into full use of this assessment format in May 1993. Now three years after the first discussion, the individual assessment is embedded in classroom instruction and administered to all students in September, January, and May.

Shifts in "Average" Levels of Performance

Progress is graphed according to defined instructional and developmental reading levels. Not surprisingly, overall system achievement of students has surged. In the past three years, the "grade level" benchmark has been raised progressively to level 16 (locally developed but closely similar to RR levels) and still 90% of the 350 first graders have exceeded the mark, many of them significantly. Of the remaining 10%, six percent are special education students with significant handicaps.

The RR program, which helped focus discussion and propel overall classroom reading instruction to a new level, now faces increased challenges in helping children reach the average level of their peers. Whereas in 1991-92, RR students discontinued at a classroom average of level 12, by 1994-95, the average had risen to level 16 and students commonly were reading in the 22 to 26 range. Students with so far to come must now go farther, and there seems to be no shortage of children with significant language deficits. Recognizing this development, the response in Bangor has been to develop literacy intervention at the kindergarten level and to sustain progress through literacy grouping at grade one. Not surprisingly, these programs draw their organization and instructional philosophies from the tenets of RR.

Reading Recovery Served as the Catalyst for Change

Bangor's first grade teachers, now critical partners in assisting the acceleration of at-risk readers with RR teachers, have forged a unified instructional and evaluation approach based on the analysis elements of RR. Their classroom instruction will never be the same, and RR implementation has been the catalyst. The RR program may not have wanted or intended to drive the restructuring of classroom literacy instruction, but fortunately for Bangor's first graders, it stepped into an instructional arena ready for change.